

Tell Me The Story: *Grace Outruns the Avalanche* - week 7
Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Oct. 10, 2021

Read Genesis 3:8-24 NIV

Genesis 3:8-24 has to be one of the saddest stories ever told. And rightly so, for in this story we are reading about the collapsing of God's good world.

The living God had, out of love and great joy, brought humanity into being in paradise. The living God had, with deep affection and much delight, formed us to live in relationship with the earth, with others, with the self, and with God. And then in Genesis 3 the fourfold relational harmony is falling apart, quickly unraveling. To put it more bluntly, the relational harmony is dying.

I think what makes the story so sad is that we are seeing it played out in our time right before our very eyes in terribly sad ways. The news headlines confirm that this Genesis story is speaking truth, sad truth. But there's grace.

As sad as the story is, the fact that the story is told is a grace. We should be thankful that the God who sings the joyful story of Genesis 1 and tells the happy story of Genesis 2, also bothers to tell the sad story of Genesis 3. This is because the story is telling us what every person alive today implicitly feels. The story is telling us that things are not now the way they are supposed to be. The story is describing death, and the story is telling us that

death is not supposed to be present. Just knowing this fact brings some relief and comfort.

It also speaks to Christian ethics. The world tries to make ethics based on the way things are, but that's a problem, because things are not the way they are supposed to be. We, therefore, cannot make our ethical choices based on what we see around us. Instead, we need to know the ethics of God's Kingdom. For many, revenge is a justifiable ethic, "payback," an eye-for-an-eye, but in God's Kingdom, Jesus' example shows us a better way we were made to live. We cannot make our ethics based on the way things are, because the world is not the way it's supposed to be.

While this story in Genesis 3 is sad, it is also full of grace for the survivors. There's an avalanche of sin, a quickly moving breakdown of all four relationships we were made to enjoy. But thankfully, the story also describes the quickly moving grace of God. The Garden may have become a cemetery, but in the cemetery there are amazing signs of life because of God's amazing grace.

In our last sermon we saw how the enemy of God, the serpent, came into the picture and started corrupting the first humans' minds, and how he still tries to do this with us. The evil one twists God's good command in ways that raise suspicion about the goodness and generosity of God.

Sadly, we saw the first humans buy into the serpent's twisting, and conclude that they must have the knowledge of good and evil. They go out on their own in attempt to make life on earth work according to their own plans and desires. They decide that they do not need to remain in a dependent relationship with their Creator.

The result is what we read today in Genesis 3. All four relationships unravel. Our relationship with God unravels. What was a relationship of trust, delight, love, and intimacy is now marked by suspicion, doubt, fear, and guilt.

Genesis 3:8 says, **“And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”** They feel ashamed and try to hide.

The same is true of Adam and Eve's offspring. We all try to hide. Of course, there is a sense in which we all seek God, for we long for the Creator and Sustainer of our lives. We do love God. But when we sense the gentle stirring of God's movement in our lives, we often hide.

We try to hide under noise. We keep the radio and television on. Yes, sometimes we do this for good reasons, but often unconsciously we do this to silence the sounds of God walking in the places where we live and work.

We try to hide in our busyness. Yes, often we are active because we really care about others or because we are alive with creative ideas and energy. But often we stay busy so we do not have to deal with the sound of the Creator moving around us.

We may hide through chemicals. We use them to drown out the sound of God.

We may hide behind skepticism. There certainly are mysteries involved in knowing and trusting God, and we do not need to minimize them. But often, rather than a true lack of evidence, we use these mysteries, these intellectual challenges, as excuses to not believe when our hearts know that believing requires changing and we do not want to change.

We also hide, like Adam and Eve, by not excepting responsibility for our choices. In Genesis 3, when God does speak and confront the first humans about their disobedience, they shift the blame. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. Adam even blames God: **“the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree”** (Gen 3:22). We hide through blame.

And we hide through religion. This might be surprising, but we may choose religious practices, rather than relationship practices with the Living God. Because the One true living God is now experienced as a threat, we invent a god of religious practices with whom we can

comfortably live with. We shape a god in our image, one who does not upset our lives. We create a god we can handle, who baptizes our own understanding of reality.

What was originally a relationship of trust, delight, love, and intimacy is now marked by suspicion, doubt, fear, guilt, and hiding. When God comes walking; we go hiding. It's what our first parents did.

We like, Adam and Eve, decide we do not want to live with our Creator at the center of our lives. But we were never meant to occupy the center. We need to let God restore our right-relatedness with him our Creator.

This right-relatedness is also needed for all our other relationships. For this alienation from God also has immediate effects for our relationship with others. Adam blames Eve, and God's good gift of a life partner begins to unravel. Rather than accept responsibility for his own actions, he projects it onto Eve. All their subsequent offspring follow this pattern. We blame parents, culture, and the environment - and they do have a role to play! - but ultimately, we choose to talk, feel, and act the way we do.

Alienation from God and from the self results in the breakdown of our human community. The relationship between the man and the woman was originally one of trust, care, attentiveness, servanthood, and mutuality. Now it is marked by competition and the desire to

dominate. In Genesis 3:16, God is not prescribing; he is sadly describing what happens when we disobey the one command.

Finally, Genesis 3 tells us that all the spiritual, psychological, and relational alienation that comes as a result of sin also affects one's relationship with the earth; it too unravels. The avalanche gathers up the created order in its sweep and leaves **“thorns and thistles”** in its wake. The creation groans.

But God's grace keeps pace with this avalanche.

Although the earth no longer works as freely and fruitfully as God designed it to work, creation still yields fruit and so do people. This is a result of God's grace. God could've left the earth to die completely. But thanks to him, the earth still yields food. And although the relationship between the man and the woman has been damaged, they still want each other; they still care. Every time any relationship works, it is a sign of grace. Why does the world, even the unbelieving world, honor people like Mother Theresa? Because people like Mother Theresa are signs of grace: rejecting the way of dominance and lordship and choosing the way of servanthood.

Although their relationship is unraveling, Adam still delights in Eve, and he recognizes that although death has entered the world, God still brings forth life. Eve's very name means **“living.”** Truly, every baby that daughter's of

Eve deliver are a sign that God has not given up on the world.

Grace keeps pace with the avalanche of sin.

So the relationship with the self is now problematic, God meets the humans in their shame, making coverings for their nakedness. Earlier in Genesis 3, the first humans tried to cover their shame by making clothes out of fig leaves. But God does better. God does for the couple what they cannot do for themselves. While they cannot deal with their shame: God can, will, and does. There is tender grace in their relationship with God.

Their relationship with God is full of grace. God asks the question, **“Where are you?”** (v. 9) The point here is that God still wants the relationship. The question is pure grace. Obviously he knows where they are - and where we are. But his question draws them back into relationship. Because we are afraid and feel such a shame, because we often hide, God draws us back.

“Where are you?” does not drive them into further hiding and it does not pile on the guilt either. **“Where are you?”** is a tremendous grace! A sign that God wants to reestablish the relationship of trust and intimacy. Knowing our felt need to hide because of shame, he provides clothes, which is a hiding place in his presence.

God always does this for us. Isaiah 61:10 says, “I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He is wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.”

God's act in the garden-become-cemetery prefigures the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For where did God get the skins to cover the first humans? From a dead animal. A sacrifice takes place in order to cover their shame and take away their fear.

Even after this there is more grace. God guards the way to the Tree of Life (v 24), which is an enormously merciful grace because it protects Adam and Eve from a horrible judgment. God does not want them to go on living in independence, in a fallen state. He plans to rescue and restore them, not let them live forever apart from him. God does not want us to grab hold of the Tree of Life and go on living forever in this not-best-of-all-possible-worlds. This is not the best of all possible worlds. God does not want humans to live forever in alienation from him, from ourselves, from others, and from the earth, so he guards the way to the Tree of Life. Grace is now out running the avalanche!

Verse 15 then speaks what is called the “proto-gospel,” it’s speaking of the **seed of Eve** who will strike the serpent on the head. This **Seed of Eve** [Jesus] will overcome the serpent. That is the proto-gospel, and then the Gospel of Easter morning is Jesus standing in another garden-

become-cemetery, near his garden tomb, as he calls to Mary Magdalene. Isn't it fitting that she thinks he's a gardener? Well, he is the Gardener, capital G, walking in the garden again calling Mary and us to himself.

God's grace is outrunning the avalanche of sin. It always does.

Look what has come to the garden-become-cemetery: Jesus, whose name means "*Yahweh-to-the-rescue*". The apostle Paul will trumpet throughout the collapsing Roman Empire, "**But where sin increased, gave abounded all the more,**" literally, "**grace super-abounded**" (Rom 5:20). And the next verse: "**so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**"

God's grace will always outrun our sin. Jesus is our guarantee.

(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's book *The Story of All Stories*.)